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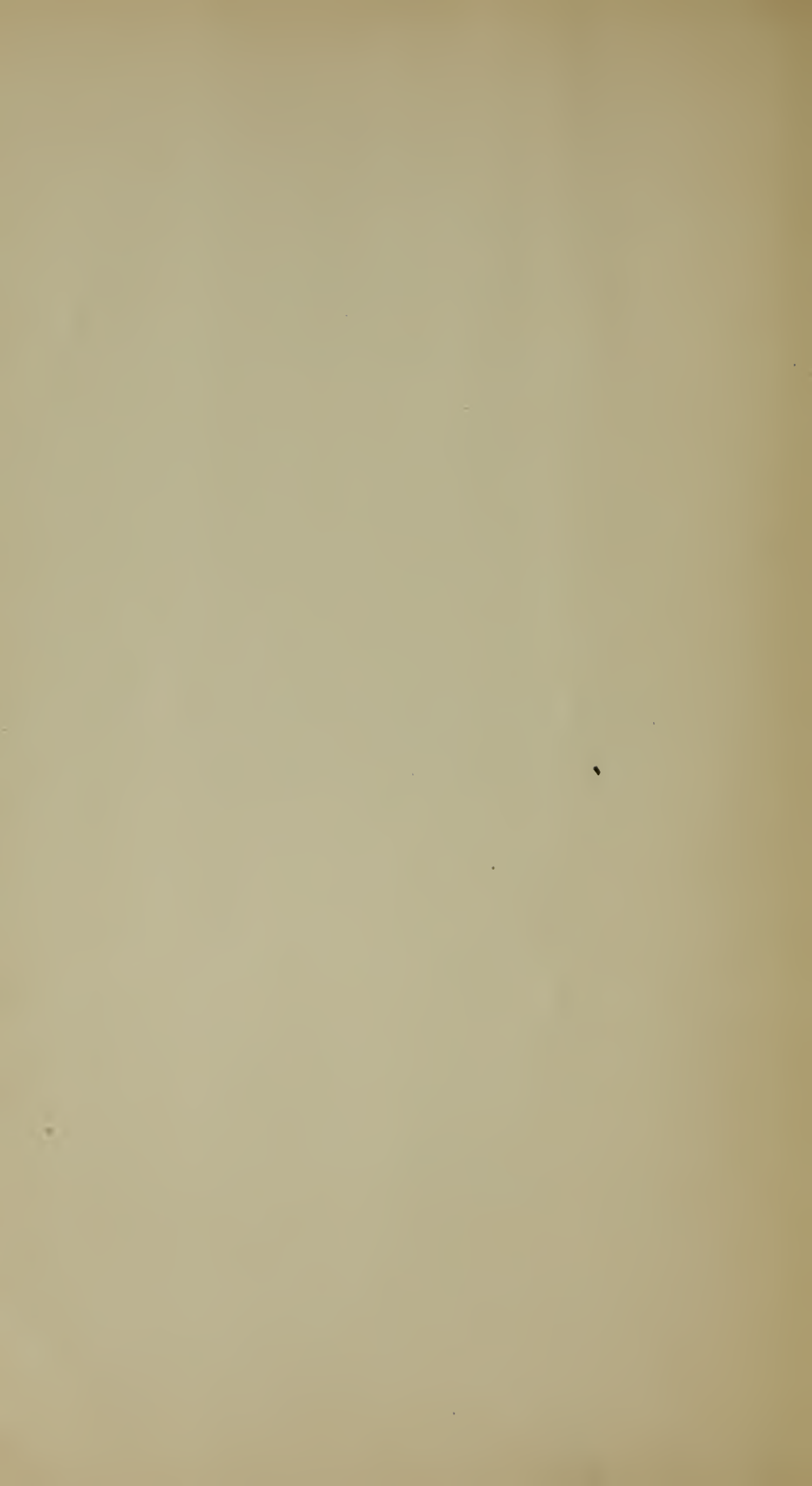
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A Hundred Years
of Congregationalism
in the Champlain Valley.

A HUNDRED YEARS
OF CONGREGATIONALISM
IN THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY.

SOME HISTORICAL FACTS PRESENTED IN A PAPER BEFORE THE
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A HUNDRED YEARS OF CONGREGATIONALISM IN THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY.

It is the wise sentiment of an English historian that "a people who take no pride in the achievements of their ancestors will never have anything to be remembered by their descendants." The pride which Vermonters take, therefore, in the position and influence of their native State and the achievements of her sons, is both lawful and laudable, and it is not an unworthy jealousy which guards her reputation and forbids that her just honors be forgotten or attributed elsewhere. And not only is it a matter of local and patriotic pride, but it imposes responsibilities and is an incentive to continuance. The comparative influence of Vermont in the Union during the hundred years of her history, by her public men, as well as by thousands of her sons as citizens throughout the west and south, is a stimulus to maintain and extend the same through her institutions to the future. To keep the position already gained, not to fall behind relatively in the race, as the field broadens in these later days, appeals alike to the patriotism and sense of duty of every citizen, and prompts still larger effort.

To those who have given little attention to the facts, it will perhaps be a surprise to learn that native Vermonters, probably exceeding in number and influence the natives of any other State in the Union in proportion to population, have filled the most important executive, judicial, diplomatic, legislative and civil offices in the United States, while at the same time the State's own representation in Congress has always been held good, and an abundance of unused material been constantly in reserve. And to these should be added

an unknown number of local eminence and wide influence on the bench, and at the bar, and in other secular professions in every State from New England to the Pacific coast.

Only a small part of the story, however, is thus told. It is in the higher sphere of distinctively moral and religious influence, not in our own country alone, but the world, that the record of our little State, to one who looks beneath the surface, is grandest and most inspiring. There are annually enrolled among the dead the names of choice men and leaders in various departments of religious, philanthropic and higher educational work, in our own land and on foreign missionary ground, which are representative of no inconsiderable army of such men occupying strategic points who had their birth and training under the formative influences of the churches, many of them now feeble if not extinct, of our Vermont hills and valleys. And the magnitude and quality of the services of such men is an inspiration. It sets in bold relief the responsibility still of the cultivation of these fields in the interests of Christian truth and righteousness, to many of which, as of old, the honor shall be given in the Lord's reckoning "*that this man was born there.*"

For the source of this influence, and to answer the questions, Whence? and How? we look to the early days—the spirit of the pioneers in the settlement of these towns, and the institutions which they planted and fostered. A hundred years carries us back almost to the beginning, and the study of the beginning and unfolding of religious enterprises is especially instructive.

Congregationalism was the first and chief denominational influence in the beginning of the settlement of the State, and it has maintained its ascendancy to the present. Without, however, ignoring or depreciating the eminent contributions of other churches, or forgetting even the sadly contrasted

fact that scandalous errors and fanaticism have also sometime had their birth and nurture in our generous mountain soil, attention is now directed to some review of what the Congregational churches of the Champlain valley have done along the lines indicated. An exhaustive enumeration, or exact estimate of values, is in the nature of the case impossible, much less is it attempted, but some illustrative data may be given from which broader inductions can be fairly made. The starting point is certain aggregates and comparisons which may be hereafter amplified in further detail. And the figures given are not random guesses, but facts susceptible of verification by records and papers on file and gathered with care within the last twenty years. They are also probably underestimates rather than otherwise, since, from the meagreness and confusion of both church and family records in the earlier years, many facts and names have undoubtedly escaped the catalogue. For the purpose of definiteness let it be understood that the territory called the Champlain valley in this survey will be considered to include that part of Vermont which lies within the present bounds of the Rutland, Addison, Chittenden and Franklin and Grand Isle conferences of Congregational churches.

In this territory there are now fifty-nine Congregational churches, with an average of a little more than one hundred resident members each. Only fifteen of these churches existed a hundred years ago, and two then existed which have since become extinct, making seventeen in all, viz.: twelve in Rutland conference which now counts seventeen; four in Addison conference as against the present twelve; one in Chittenden conference where seventeen are now reckoned; and none at all in Franklin and Grand Isle conference in which thirteen is the present number. No church was in existence north of Hinesburgh, and the only others north of

Rutland county were Bridport, Cornwall, Middlebury and Orwell, the oldest, Cornwall, being a child of only five years. The first church in Jericho and the church in Sudbury were born the next year. Charlotte and Wallingford were yet two years to come, Georgia and Vergennes three years, Shoreham and Weybridge four, South Hero five, and the two churches in New Haven seven. In the decade 1790-1800, sixteen churches were organized, and twenty between 1800 and 1810. From 1810 to 1820 eleven were formed, eight from 1820 to 1830, and four from 1830 to 1840, while in the last fifty years since 1840 only nine new ones have been organized. The ratio of increase is much the largest from 1790 to 1810, being thirty-six churches in twenty years, or an average of one and three-fourths per year, and more than tripling the number at the beginning. In the next thirty years there were only twenty-three formed, or less than two-thirds as many, and in the last half of the hundred years since 1840 only nine, or one-fourth as many as in the first twenty years. Twenty-six churches in the hundred years have become extinct, including two of the original seventeen, several of them, however, by re-organization or the union of two or more in larger and stronger bodies. The whole number of churches, therefore, in this territory to the present time is eighty-five distinct organizations, a little more than two-thirds of which survive.

An old Vermont calendar, or almanac, by James Lyon of Fairhaven, (Son of the famous Matthew Lyon,) published in Rutland about 1794, has the following facts of interest in this connection. In 1793 Congress established two post roads in Vermont, one on the east side of the mountains and the other on the west side. There were only nine post-offices, six of them being on the west side, viz.; Bennington, Manchester, Rutland, Middlebury, Vergennes and Burling-

ton. There were then in the State five Episcopalian, thirty-six Congregational, thirteen Baptist, and three Presbyterian churches. Ten years later, in 1804, by the same authority, there were sixty post towns, thirty-nine Congregational, twenty Baptist, three Episcopalian, two Universalist, two Quaker, and one Presbyterian church. Even then Methodism does not appear as having started upon her competing and successful career in the State.

The eighty-five churches enumerated have been served to the present time by two hundred and ninety settled pastors, with an average length of pastorate of eight and three-fourths years. Twenty-nine of these pastorates, just one-tenth of the whole number, have been over twenty years in length, and these longer pastorates, like the increase of the churches, lie more largely in the first half of the century, only six coming wholly within the last half, and nine others terminating since 1840. In the latter years the practice of installation has not been so uniformly observed as at the beginning, and to the settled pastors should therefore be added numerous others who have served the churches for longer or shorter periods without the formality of settlement.

These same churches have given about three hundred natives to the ministry, besides over two hundred wives of ministers. And of the native ministers, two hundred and thirty-seven, or about four-fifths, received a full collegiate education, and several others a partial one, more than three-fourths of them,—one hundred and eighty, in our two Vermont colleges, one hundred and thirty-five being graduated from Middlebury college, and forty-five from the University of Vermont. Among these natives are found no less than thirteen foreign missionaries, five college presidents, and some twenty-five college and theological professors, editors, and secretaries of benevolent societies. Several unordained missionaries,

teachers, etc., should also be added to the list, one of whom may be specially mentioned who became the wife of Rev. Elias Boudinot, a converted Cherokee chief. Some of the best of these men and women were from the smaller towns where the churches have now become extinct, the twenty-six churches of this class having employed twenty-three settled pastors at an average of six and one-fourth years each, and sent out thirty native ministers, of whom twenty were college graduates, and twenty-six wives of ministers. It is to be noted that this enumeration of natives makes no account of a large number additional of prominent and educated men who have gone from these churches to other occupations than the ministry.

Another emphatic and suggestive fact is, that almost the whole of the Champlain Valley was originally home missionary ground, and that most of its churches, some of them now the strongest, are the fruit of home missionary labor in the crisis of their formation. With the rapid settlement of the wilderness a hundred years ago there were other intensely active forces at work. Parallel with the thoughts of men for worldly livelihood and gain, there was thought also for their higher well being. And we take it as one of the indications of God's providence for his church, as well as a cause of profound thankfulness on our part to-day, that the heaven not only of sound political principle but of an evangelical faith, came with and in the stress of the pioneer settlement of these valleys and hillsides. It is well known that for twenty years previous to the formation of our own Vermont Missionary Society in 1807, missionaries were sent into the new settlements of Vermont by the Missionary societies of Connecticut and Berkshire county, Mass., and that a large number of our churches owe their origin to these labors. In the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, the organ of the former soci-

ety, are found reports of the labors of the missionaries. In 1802 the Rev Jedediah Bushnell spent eleven months of his appointment in north-western Vermont, and was reappointed to the same field "on account of the uncommon attention of the people," and he reports having received from the contributions of the people nearly £20. The same year the trustees of the society voted to employ "a permanent missionary" in the northern counties of Vermont, and upon the list of those so employed from 1802 to 1805 are the names of Rev's. Willard, Gillet, Huntington, Hallock, Swift, Morgan, and others, by whom more than three years of continuous service was performed. In Castleton, then without a minister and ready almost to die, under the labors of Rev. William F. Miller, sent there by the Connecticut society for four months, there was a great revival and the church was saved, more than doubling her membership. One writes concerning it, "We have often heard of the blessed effects of the labors of missionaries in this State and elsewhere, but never experienced them in so sensible a manner as of late."

In 1803 Messrs. Bushnell and Leonard itinerated as missionaries one-half the time in North Western Vermont. The Rev. Job Swift was also appointed to a mission of four months to the settlements west of Lake Champlain and the north-western part of Vermont. It is a matter of record that several of the churches in New York, especially in Essex county, and as far south as Granville, were formed as the fruit of such effort and for many years had their ecclesiastical connection with the Vermont State Convention, being reported with those of the Champlain Valley. The Rev. Benjamin Wooster, from 1802 to 1805, received over \$300 from the Berkshire County Society for missionary services in eastern New York and north-western Vermont, and in 1805 the Rev. Asaph Morgan was commissioned by the

same society for two months, at \$6 per week, to labor in north-western Vermont. The record of one missionary in 1802 is as follows: "Rev. Nathaniel Turner served as missionary eight weeks, rode 770 miles, preached fifty-eight times, attended three church meetings and three conferences, baptized eleven persons, formed one church and assisted in uniting two small churches in one." Another record, that of Rev. Wm. F. Miller (before mentioned) in 1803, for four months, is, "rode 1,088 miles, formed two churches, administered the Sacraments of the Lord's Supper nine times, preached one hundred and thirty-five sermons, attended seven public conferences, admitted thirty into churches, baptized six adults and eighty-one children," etc., etc. These are specimens of the reports, and an indication of the extent and quality and method of these labors in the Champlain Valley in the beginning of the century. The churches in Pawlet, Addison, Bridport, Vergennes and many others, especially in the two northern conferences, were the finest of these labors, and the names of Bushnell, Miller, Haynes, Baldwin, Swift, Morgan, Parker, Wooster and others are fragrant to the present time in those localities. In 1807 the Vermont Missionary Society was formed, and it seems not too much to say that it was largely through the influence of men like Haynes, Merrill and Wooster, who knew the conditions and results of such labor in this vicinity. Indeed it was Revs. Lemuel Haynes, Jedediah Bushnell and Benjamin Wooster, who issued the circular letter, in April, 1804, to the churches in the western districts of Vermont for contributions to defray the expense of missions in the new settlements, which was the initiatory step resulting, after three years, in the formation of the Vermont Society. This organization gave new impulse and directness, and greatly enlarged scope, to this kind of labor, and in the five years,

1809-14, sixteen of the pastors of these churches are found upon the roll of its missionaries, for a period of from six weeks to over a year each, performing over seven years of service outside their own parishes, equivalent to the continuous service of one and one-half men during the whole period. Besides the names already mentioned in these labors, are those of Revs. Jonathan Hovey, S. L. Bingham, Increase Graves, Evans Beardsley, Rufus Cushman, Simeon Parmelee, Ebenezer Hebard, Sylvanus Chapin, Martin Powell, Josiah Hopkins, John Griswold and Justin Parsons.

Other benevolent organizations of the State seem also to have had their origin, or at least their formative impulse and chief support, with the Congregational pastors and churches of this valley. At the meeting of the State convention in 1812, Revs. Heman Ball, Thomas A. Merrill, Daniel C. Sanders and Holland Weeks were appointed upon a committee "to prepare and digest a plan for the organization and government" of a Vermont Bible Society. The committee held its first meeting with Rev. Heman Ball at Rutland, the next month, October, and completed the organization, adopting constitution, &c., and of the officers chosen at the first meeting of the society, the same month, the vice-president, three of the seven directors and the secretary were from the Champlain Valley. It appears, therefore, that not only was our General convention the body to move authoritatively in this matter, originating and giving shape to the organization upon the broad Catholic basis continued to the present time, but that the controlling influence was from leading men in this section. The same is true also of the formation of the Vermont Education Society, auxilliary to the American Education Society, which for many years was efficient in its work of aiding young men of Vermont in preparation for the ministry—of a society also for publication and the dissemina-

tion of religious knowledge (a sort of tract society)—and of a scheme for a Vermont Theological Seminary, which agitated the convention for three or four years, but happily failed of accomplishment, although such progress was made that Revs. Merrill, Haskel and Griswold were appointed upon a committee to digest a plan. In this connection, however, mention should not be omitted of the private theological seminary of Dr. Josiah Hopkins, while pastor at New Haven for over twenty years, in which no inconsiderable number of men were educated. A single church in 1818 proposed “to defray the expenses of a college education for one young man of hopeful piety whose object is the ministry,” and the young man so aided became a foreign missionary for several years, and afterwards served, with great acceptance and success, one of the home missionary churches of the state. Another young man, converted while a member of college and uniting with the Congregational church, though afterwards receiving Episcopal ordination, became a successful pioneer laborer among the blacks at the south and the first agent of the American Colonization society, establishing the colony of free blacks on the western coast of Africa, where he died at the early age of 30.

It was in this part of the state in the earlier years that the consociation movement among the churches, for “mutual fellowship, watch and assistance,” was much the strongest and most efficient, furnishing the basis of the representation of the churches in the convention, until displaced in recent years by the more Congregational conference. Nor should it be forgotten that it was the conservative influence of leading men in this vicinity, in the great anti-Masonic and anti-Slavery agitations, which saved the convention and the churches from rupture.

As indicative somewhat of the general scope of doctrine,

and the practice of the churches in the earlier days, the following is an example:—Among the articles of faith adopted by one of the churches at its organization is this, “We believe the catechism and the articles of faith adopted by the assembly of divines at Westminster to be agreeable to the word of God”—and among the rules of order are these, “as the education of children is of vast importance, when there appears to be great neglect, the faulty parent is to be admonished.” “It belongs to the church to see that the pastor is well supported, that he may give himself wholly to the work of the ministry.” “The church ought to take a kind and tender care of all the poor members so that none shall suffer want.”

Some periods of extensive revival among the churches are specially to be noted. In 1803–4 a revival began under missionary labor at Castleton, as before mentioned, extending first to Rutland and Pittsford, in which towns over one hundred made a public profession of religion, and thence moving northward. Rev. John B. Preston, of Rupert, under date of July 7, 1804, writes concerning it: “Within little more than a year past the Spirit has been wonderfully poured out upon a number of towns and about one thousand have been added to the different branches of the Congregational Church of Christ.” Among the towns which he mentions, in none of which less than fifty were added, and in some over one hundred, are Tinmouth, Rutland, Brandon, Pittsford, Benson and Orwell in Rutland County, while further north Bridport, Addison and Weybridge shared in the work, and its influence also reached some towns in Chittenden County. There were some “awakenings,” so called, in limited localities, affecting at most only a few churches, in the following years, most notably perhaps in 1809 and 1816, but generally there seems to have been a dearth of spiritual

influence for several years before and after the war of 1812. In 1821-22, however, there were great revivals. Nine hundred professed religion in Addison Association alone, of which six hundred united with the Congregational churches. It extended also to Rutland County, and probably not less than one thousand new members were the fruits to the churches of the Champlain Valley. 1830-31 also was a period of extensive revival in this region, as well as throughout the State. It was estimated that not less than 5,500 conversions took place in connection with the Congregational churches of the State, the larger part in the western section. More than one-half the churches were specially visited. The great temperance reformation at that time was regarded as the pioneer in preparing the way of the Lord. It was a time of great emergency, and of the introduction also of "new measures" in revival and evangelistic work. Churches and pastors were aroused. Rev. Charles G. Finney was drawing attention in New York. Jedediah Burchard, "a recent dry goods auctioneer of Albany, N.Y.," appeared upon the scene. Without order or method in his public address, and with the flippancy of an auctioneer, from the high calvinistic view, he urged the claims of God upon the sinner and the immediate duty of submission. "Protracted meetings" were held, the first in the State in the town of Addison, followed by the same in other towns in all this region. Among other innovations the custom was introduced of asking special prayers for unconverted friends; and it is authentically stated that the son of the pastor of one of the churches where meetings were being held, who had left his home to seek his fortune in the world, was made the subject of this request and of many earnest prayers, which son is now vice-President of the United States. In the ten years, 1830-40, there were reported, very imperfectly, over 4,500 addi-

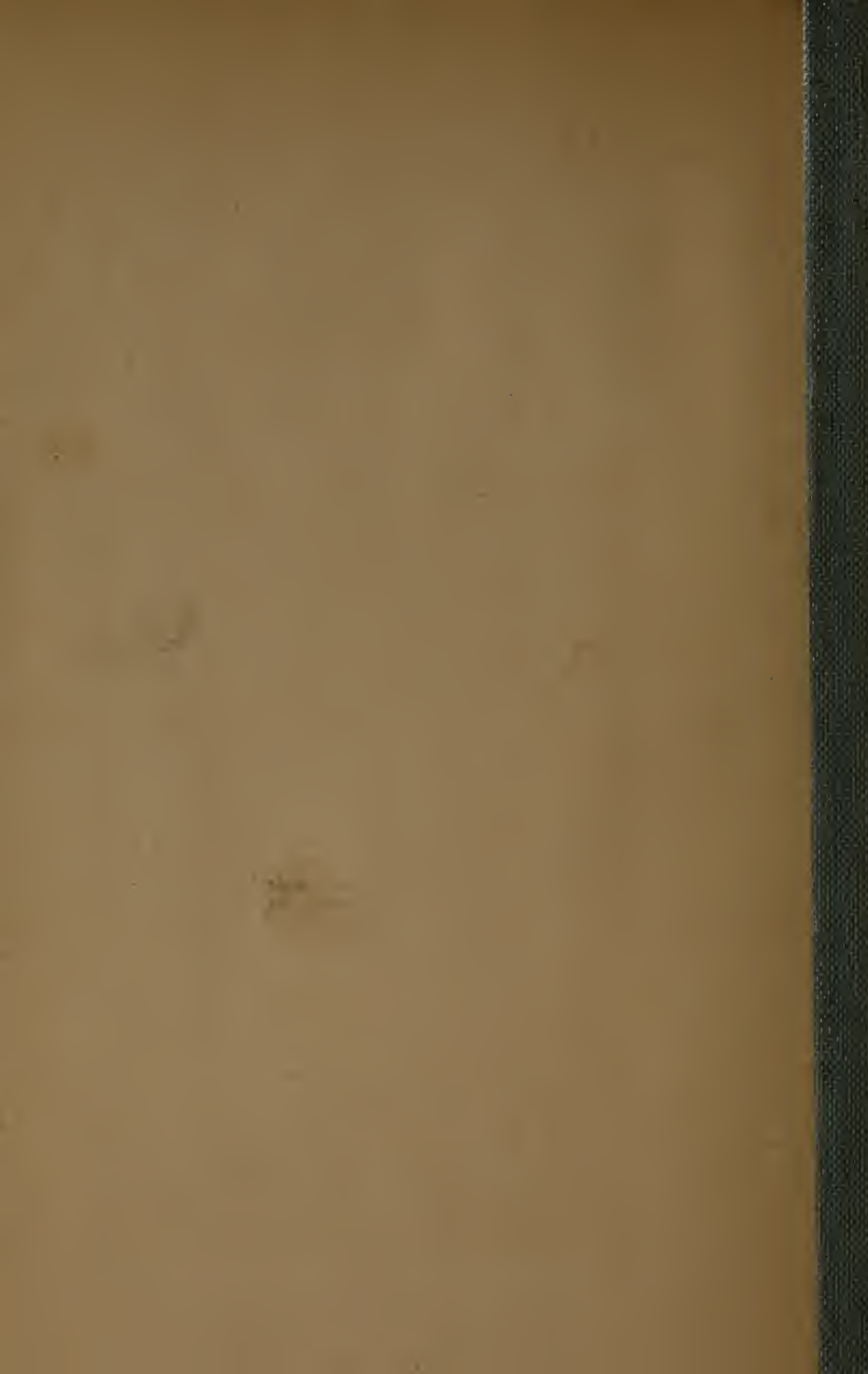
tions on profession of faith to the churches in the Champlain Valley, ranging from not less than 200 to over 1,300 in single years. In one year over twenty of these churches reported from twelve to sixty additions each, and upwards, and some reached into the hundreds. At least twenty churches rose to two hundred members, or more, among which were Cornwall, Shoreham, Bridport, Benson, Enosburgh, Jericho, Essex, Castleton and Pawlet, of which some are now reduced to less than one hundred. Several of the churches also gained their highwater mark of membership in this period. Middlebury rose to 719, Cornwall to almost 400, Castleton and Vergennes to over 350, and New Haven to over 300. It is not to our purpose here to weigh the more remote results, or the excesses and inevitable reactions which followed. But it is significant perhaps to note that in no equal period since have these churches received to membership more than a fraction of the members then received, while difficult cases of discipline have in not rare instances, wrought serious and lasting injury. In the last decade of the last half of the century under review, 1880-90, as compared with that of the first half, the additions to the churches have been only about one-half the number of the former period, and in but one of the later years have they reached even the average of the former ten.

It only remains at this point to mention the names of some of the prominent pastors, and others, whose influence has so largely contributed to the stability and growth of the churches during the hundred years. The list includes such names as Revs. Dan Kent, D. D. Francis and Wm. S. Smart, D. D., of Benson; Ebenezer Hebard, Beriah Green, Ira Ingraham and Drs. Curtis and Shedd, of Brandon; Elihu Smith, Joseph Steele and Dr. Child of Castleton; Rufus Cushman and Dr. E. W. Hooker of Fair Haven; John Gris-

wold and Doctor E. W. Plumb of Pawlet ; Eleazar Harwood, Holland Weeks and Drs. Charles Walker and C. C. McIntyre of Pittsford ; Ithamae Hibbard and John G. Hale of Poultney ; Lemuel Haynes and Drs. Aldace Walker and H. M. Grout of West Rutland ; Heman Ball, Wm. Mitchell, Drs. Aiken, Seaver, Johnson and others, of Rutland ; Benjamin Osborn of Wallingford ; Stephen Martindale and Dr. C. C. Parker of Tinmouth ; Chauncy Taylor of Chittenden ; Justus S. Hough of Addison ; Increase Graves, Dana Lamb, F. W. Olmstead and W. W. Winchester of Bridport ; Jedediah Bushnell and others, of Cornwall ; Drs. Merrill, Hyde, Hooker and others of Middlebury ; Dr. Josiah Hopkins, Joel Fisk and Samuel Hurlburt of New Haven ; Mason Knapen and Dr. R. S. Cushman, of Orwell ; Cephas H. Kent of Ripton ; Geo. W. Barrows of Salisbury ; Daniel O. Morton and Josiah F. Goodhue of Shoreham ; Hough, Leavitt, Spaulding and Torrey, of Vergennes ; Hovey, of Weybridge ; Parsons, of Whiting ; Haskell, Converse, Worcester, Griffin, Brastow and Safford, of Burlington ; Baldwin, Yale, Goodman and Bingham, of Charlotte ; Morgan and Warren, of Essex ; Hoyt and Ferrin, of Hinesburgh ; Kingsbury, Blodgett and Wheeler, of Jericho ; Dougherty, Parmelee and Woodward, of Milton ; Lyon and Wheeler, of South Hero ; Parker, of Underhill ; Johnson, Barber and Maynard, of Williston ; Boardman and Wright, of Bakersfield ; Bailey, of Berkshire ; Wooster, of Fairfield ; French, of Franklin ; Ranslow, of Georgia ; Kingsley, of Highgate ; Paine, of Montgomery ; Drs. Smith, Cutler, Rankin, Bittinger and Van Norden, of St. Albans, and Dorman of Swanton.

A larger list of equally prominent natives, living and dead, need not here be enumerated. Mention should not be omitted in addition of the presidents of the two colleges—Drs. Benedict, Marsh, Wheeler, Pease and Torrey, of the

University, and Bates, Labaree and Kitchell, of Middlebury—nor of ex-Governors William Slade and Horace Eaton, the former a member of Congress for twelve years and the secretary and agent of the “National Board of Popular Education”;—nor of Mrs. Emma (Hart) Willard, the pioneer of female education;—nor last, of “Father” Asa Lyon, the “sage of the island,” for forty-five years pastor at South Hero, who was also lawyer, legislator, judge, and member of Congress, “among the first divines of our country and age,” a man of “great and varied attainments,” and one who “in any position of the country, or any theatre of human enterprise and exertion, would have been pronounced a *great man*,” who died at a good old age, and was buried, at his own request without a monument to mark his resting place.



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